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Implications of a Mutual Reduction of US and Soviet Forces in Europe

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IMPLICATIONS OF A MUTUAL REDUCTION OF US AND SOVIET FORCES IN EUROPE

THE PROBLEM

To estimate: (a) Soviet, East European, and West European reactions to proposals for a reduction of military forces deployed in Germany by both sides, whether by formal agreement or otherwise; and (b) the longer term implications of such reductions if they occurred.

CONCLUSIONS

A. While probably willing to see a reduction in military forces in Europe, the Soviets would hope to link any agreement to their political demands for a European settlement. Therefore chances of a formal agreement would be poor. The Soviets might be willing to respond to Western reductions by mutual example, but the war in Vietnam presents an obstacle to withdrawals even on this basis. Among Moscow's objectives in any withdrawals would be the reduction of American influence in Europe, the isolation and containment of West Germany, and the weakening of the Atlantic Alliance.

B. If reductions were actually made, we do not believe that they would lead to major changes in Soviet policy toward Europe. The Soviets would hope that reductions would bring them closer to a European security settlement based on the existence of two German states. It cannot be excluded, however, that in some future context the Soviets would think it advantageous to return to a threatening posture.

C. Most West European governments would accept in principle the desirability of a cutback of military strength on both sides of the Iron Curtain in central Europe. All of them would see such steps as

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promoting detente. Some would hope that their own military expenditures might be cut back. Some, such as the Federal Republic and France, would see such steps as advancing their own particular political aspirations. Most of these countries would see considerable cuts in US and Soviet conventional forces in central Europe as compatible with their security provided they felt that such cuts were roughly equivalent on both sides and did not signify any weakening of the US political commitment to European defense. But they would resist more strongly cuts in Allied nuclear strength in Western Europe.

D. If Europeans came to believe that force cuts had enhanced Soviet relative military strength on the Continent, or signified a diminished US commitment to European security, they might, over time, be less likely to stand firm against pressures for all-European security arrangements on Soviet terms.

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DISCUSSION

I. BACKGROUND

1. Both East and West have made proposals in the past two decades for the mutual limitation or reduction of military forces and armaments in central Europe. Some of these proposals have called for reducing or eliminating nuclear weapons deployed in the area; others have emphasized the "thinning out" or disengagement of conventional forces. Of the latter, some have called only for the reduction of foreign troops in Germany, while others have also called for limiting the national armed forces of East and West Germany. All Soviet and East European proposals have represented the official policies—or at least the official propaganda—of the originating governments. In the West, while some proposals have been made by governments, the interest manifested in this subject by opposition political parties or influential individuals has often been greater. The various proposals of both East and West have come to naught, however, because their implications for the far broader and more complex issues of European security and the division of Germany were unacceptable to one side or the other.

2. As part of its diplomatic effort to secure Western acceptance of the permanent division of Germany, the USSR has long called for a reduction of foreign troops stationed there, sometimes specifying that it would be interested in cutting the present forces there by about one-third. The USSR has also carried out some withdrawals of its own forces, both in Germany and elsewhere, on various occasions during the past 12 years, and has urged the West to follow suit.¹ For the past year or so, however, the Soviets have soft pedaled the idea of force cuts and have urged instead that a European security conference be held to consider the formal recognition of East Germany, the acceptance of the present boundaries of both Germanies, and the denial of nuclear weapons to West Germany. They have indicated that in the context of a Europe-wide security settlement the military confrontation in Germany could be dismantled, and in particular that the US military presence there should then disappear. These Soviet views were outlined in July 1966 in the Bucharest declaration of the Warsaw Pact.

3. The West, for its part, has until recently insisted that any East-West agreement on force limitations be accompanied by positive progress toward German reunification. Until Kiesinger's Grand Coalition came to power in late 1966, all West German governments had strenuously argued that mutual force reductions would tend to perpetuate the division of Germany. With varying

¹ Since about 1955, the USSR has cut its total military strength in East Germany from over 400,000 men to slightly over 300,000 at present. Since that time, the Soviets have also withdrawn all troops from Austria (31,000); the Finnish naval base of Porkkala (5,000); the Kwantung Peninsula, Manchuria (60,000); and Rumania (35,000).

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degrees of enthusiasm, Germany's allies adhered to this position. The French under de Gaulle have been particularly strong in their support. The UK and some of the smaller NATO countries, while officially supporting the Germans, have in fact often appeared interested in discussing mutual force reductions without insisting on simultaneous progress toward reunification. All past governments in Bonn have relied heavily on the US for assistance in restraining the British from jumping the traces on this issue. The present German Government is more flexible in its approach to reunification, but it continues to believe that force withdrawals should not prejudice German security or prospects for eventual reunification.

II. REACTIONS TO NEW PROPOSALS FOR MUTUAL REDUCTIONS

A. The USSR and Eastern Europe

4. While Soviet interest and political engagement outside Europe have expanded greatly since the end of World War II, Moscow still assigns a high priority to the reduction of American influence in Europe, the isolation and containment of West Germany, and the weakening or destruction of the Atlantic Alliance. Under the general rubric of "detente," the USSR has in recent years engaged in protracted diplomatic, propaganda, and political maneuvers intended to convey to Western Europeans the belief that the Soviets have no aggressive designs on them and that military alliances in general—and NATO in particular—have no real utility on the European Continent. The impact of this line has been promising from the Soviet point of view, and the Soviet leaders evidently now recognize that the USSR would have a great deal to lose and little to gain by switching to a harsher policy in Europe.

5. Seen in this light, American withdrawals from Europe might be taken by the Soviets as a signal success for their policy, not only for any change in the balance of military power which might accrue but also for the psychological impact on Europeans. Some Europeans would regard US withdrawals as further evidence that the threat of Soviet aggression in Europe had declined; Moscow would hope that with this additional sign that danger had receded, the cohesiveness of the Atlantic Alliance and the special influence which the US has exercised within it would also further decline. Some Europeans might also conclude that the US guarantee to Europe was weakening, which would have similarly positive effects from Moscow's point of view. There are other, less important factors which might also make the prospect of mutual troop reductions in Germany attractive to Moscow. The Soviets would almost certainly welcome an opportunity to reduce their military costs in this area, and they might, over a period of time, wish to achieve more flexibility in the structure and disposition of their military resources.

6. Whatever gains Moscow might see in troop reductions in Europe, we do not believe the Soviets would accede to a request for formal negotiations on the matter. They have in fact already shown a lack of interest in such negotiations on any terms which might be acceptable to the West. [

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As long as the war in Vietnam lasts, the Soviets will wish to avoid any appearance of collusion with the US on actions which would be interpreted as leading to a redeployment of American troops to Vietnam. Instead, we believe the Soviets would respond to new requests for mutual withdrawal negotiations with a repetition of the demand that such talks take place only within the larger setting of a European settlement.

7. There are also other constraints which would make the Soviets reluctant to enter into a formal agreement on mutual troop withdrawals. The new Soviet-US confrontation over the Near East probably reduces Soviet interest in the subject for the time being, although it is unlikely to do so over the longer run. In addition, any formal negotiations, even if they conformed with Soviet desires in perpetuating the division of Germany, would pose extremely difficult problems in such areas as matching the size of cuts on each side, inspection and verification, and consultations with the East European allies. On the whole, we believe that the Soviets would be more favorably disposed toward force reductions in Europe by mutual example than by formal agreement, but the war in Vietnam would present an obstacle to withdrawals even on this basis.

8. Eastern European reactions to Soviet force reductions would vary considerably. In East Germany, we do not believe the Ulbricht government now depends directly on Soviet forces to maintain internal security. But the East Germans would demand that withdrawals took place in a framework that provided guarantees for the sovereignty and independent existence of their state. To the extent that their demands were not met, the East German leaders would be anxious and suspicious; they would take any substantial withdrawals to be evidence of the success of West Germany's new initiatives in Eastern Europe, and would feel politically isolated and vulnerable to West German initiatives.

9. The Polish Government would not object to a reduction of Soviet troops stationed in Poland, but would be apprehensive about the implications of a substantial cutback of Soviet forces in Germany. Warsaw would probably seek additional guarantees for its security, perhaps in terms of a Western assurance on the Oder-Neisse border, as part of the arrangements for reductions. In Czechoslovakia, fears of a resurgent Germany would probably also rise following substantial Soviet reductions. But the economic interests of both Poland and Czechoslovakia in the West are growing, and these states would find the progression of detente advantageous, provided that their security did not seem to be threatened by this development. Rumania, of course, bent on nourishing its trade with the West, would welcome troop withdrawals as a positive contribution to detente and as a sign of a further loosening of Moscow's hold on her East European allies. Hungary and Bulgaria would probably also be agreeable to reductions in Germany.

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B. The West European Nations

10. West European hopes for rapid progress in East-West detente have been somewhat shaken in recent months by the hardening of Soviet and East European policy toward Germany. But most West Europeans have come increasingly to believe that the USSR has no intention of embarking upon military adventures in Europe, and many believe that the expensive military forces stationed in central Europe could be reduced. Moreover, the growing prosperity and self-confidence of West European nations have increasingly led many to chafe at US leadership, and the Vietnam war has intensified feelings that European and American interests are diverging. Thus, the general political climate is one in which reductions in forces would meet with considerable satisfaction.

11. Many West Germans believe that the already planned redeployment of US and British forces from West Germany will inevitably be followed by larger cuts in the future, and they favor strong efforts to get the USSR to match these redeployments. The British are taking much the same line. The planned American and British redeployments will certainly strengthen pressures for trimming military commitments in various smaller NATO countries.

12. West European nations except for France would generally be willing to allow the US to take the lead in opening discussions with the Soviet Union on mutual force reduction proposals. In light of their experience with the Non-proliferation Treaty (NPT), they would insist that any agreement, formal or informal, be reached only with their full concurrence and as a result of detailed consultation. Even so the process of negotiation would be accompanied by a certain amount of grumbling about collusion between the superpowers and US disregard for European, basically German, interests. Such negotiations would probably be accompanied by a series of bilateral contacts between various NATO and Warsaw Pact nations. Direct negotiations between NATO and the Warsaw Pact would be extremely unlikely.

13. *Individual Nations—the United Kingdom.* The UK remains the most eager of all West European countries to start discussions with the USSR on mutual force cuts, both because of economic pressures and general enthusiasm for detente. Officially, the British Government would probably seek to avoid antagonizing the West Germans, especially while London is trying to gain membership in the Common Market. The British would not, however, insist on driving a hard bargain on inspection or matching the size of cuts.

14. *West Germany.* The present government in Bonn would like to see the planned redeployment of American and British troops from West Germany matched by Soviet withdrawals from East Germany, and would be hopeful that mutual reductions might advance its own initiatives toward the East. German leaders would, however, place great emphasis on assuring that any reductions were balanced, and they would be inclined to doubt that their allies' definition of balance was as strict as their own. The Germans have a lively appreciation of the Soviet ability to move forces from the Western USSR back

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to East Germany, and their nervousness would be intensified if substantial reductions were made on a one-to-one basis.

15. German political leaders have increasingly come to believe that Bonn should no longer insist on progress toward reunification as a prerequisite for agreements with the East on other subjects. Instead, they favor working to improve relations with the USSR, Eastern Europe, and even East Germany (in ways short of formal recognition), in the hope of inducing, over time, less rigid attitudes in the East on reunification. Bonn would hope that a reduction of the Soviet military presence would encourage the East German populace to believe that reunification was still possible, and thus would probably now be willing to discuss mutual force cuts without demanding immediate, tangible steps toward reunification. There is also some pressure in Germany to reduce Bonn's own military establishment, and some German officials would wish to include the Federal Republic's Armed Forces in any mutual reductions.

16. *France.* De Gaulle would see force reductions in central Europe, especially of Soviet and US forces, as consistent with his objectives of lessening East-West tensions, reducing American influence in Western Europe, and loosening Soviet controls in Eastern Europe. The French would probably argue that such cuts vindicated Gaullist theses on the end of the cold war in Europe, the obsolescence of NATO, and the ultimate creation of a "European" Europe. A prime French concern would be to persuade the Germans and the Soviets that in negotiations for a European settlement, Europe (led by France) should be the main Western interlocutor rather than the US. De Gaulle would be likely to support and encourage German suspicions of proposals made either by Britain or the US.

17. *Other NATO Countries.* Most of the other NATO nations would support initiatives on mutual cuts which were satisfactory to the US, the UK, and West Germany. Germany's smaller neighbors would want any arrangements to include cuts in German as well as US and British forces. The Greeks and Turks would probably be unhappy with any mutual reductions that might be worked out.

C. Differences Arising from the Size or Kinds of Proposed Reductions

18. Almost by definition, the process of mutual example implies a progression from small to larger cuts, with lengthy diplomatic discussions and pauses along the way to allow all sides to appraise the results of earlier phases. The effect of each round of cuts on the balance of forces would be the subject of careful examination, and decisions to proceed with further cuts would depend on a finding of reasonable equivalence. Nevertheless, there would be a strong tendency to believe that small cuts would lead to larger ones. In both parts of Europe the reactions we have described in preceding paragraphs would probably hold in the case of mutual reductions of up to about one-third of current force levels.

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19. We believe, however, that the West European governments except for France would oppose withdrawals larger than this or a rapid movement toward successive cuts. They would fear that such withdrawals might lead to the emasculation of the Atlantic Alliance, which they still believe provides not only the basic underpinning of their security but also a framework in which West Germany can be contained. They would also believe that large cuts would require a redefinition of NATO's strategic concepts.

20. One major question involved in the reaction of European governments would be the disposition made of nuclear-equipped forces or nuclear weapons in Europe. Most West European leaders regard NATO's superiority in tactical nuclear weapons as counterbalancing the Warsaw Pact's superiority of conventional forces in central Europe. If an NPT had been signed at the time cuts were undertaken, they would be barred from developing a joint nuclear force of their own short of full European federation. Thus a reduction of nuclear capabilities in central Europe would be resisted more strongly than cuts of conventional forces. At a minimum, European governments would seek some quid pro quo in the form of a greater pledged commitment of US nuclear forces in matters of European interest.

III. THE LONGER TERM IMPLICATIONS

21. As mutual force reductions occurred, governments in both Eastern and Western Europe would do a good deal of thinking about their long-term security and the future power relations on the Continent. The postwar policies of all European states have been strongly influenced by the presence of US and Soviet military forces in central Europe. Substantial changes in the size or character of these forces might lead to changes in the conception of various governments about the commitment and interests of the US and USSR in Europe.

22. Even though mutual cuts were roughly equivalent and left a substantial US military presence on the Continent, Moscow would probably believe that its position in Europe was somewhat improved. In order to accelerate the withdrawal of US forces and retraction of US influence, the Soviets would continue to stress the need for a reduction of tensions in central Europe and for all-European security arrangements built on the existence of two German states. They would hope that mutual force reductions would both bring them closer to this goal and contribute to the further disintegration of NATO.

23. Soviet relations with Eastern Europe would be essentially unchanged, provided a substantial Soviet presence remained in Germany. Divisive tendencies in the once monolithic East Bloc might be increased in some areas, but the bases of Soviet influence would be largely unaffected. In the northern tier, there might even be pressure for closer collaboration among Poland, Czechoslovakia, and the GDR, and between these three nations and the USSR. A large withdrawal might strengthen more moderate Communist elements within East Germany.

24. It is possible, of course, that in some future context the USSR would return to a policy of threat and intimidation in Western Europe. Such a policy

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shift would depend on many factors other than military force levels in central Europe, although one element of the equation would be Moscow's own evaluation of its military strength relative to the West, both its strategic posture vis-a-vis the US as well as the force dispositions in Europe.

25. In Western Europe, the long-term implications of force reductions would be determined principally by Europe's own continuing assessment of the Soviet threat and the firmness of the US security guarantee. If West European governments supported the force cuts, and believed that the US political commitment to Europe remained intact, such cuts would not, of themselves, necessarily have adverse effects on US-European relations. They would in fact be welcomed by many in Europe as strengthening the prospects of detente, and the US would get some of the credit.

26. If the political handling of the issue were inept, European governments might come to believe in time that the cuts had enhanced relative Soviet military strength on the Continent, and portended a weakening of the US commitment to Europe's security. In this case, they might be less likely to stand firm against pressures for an accommodation with the USSR on Soviet terms. On the other hand, cutbacks which were arrived at after thorough consultation, were carefully timed and were supported by the major West European states, would not in themselves have a harmful effect on NATO as a politico-military alliance. To the extent that reductions of conventional forces appeared to increase the importance of nuclear weapons to the defense of Europe, there would be greater pressure than in the past from Europeans to strengthen consultation in NATO on nuclear matters and to develop an appropriate strategy in the new military context. The cutbacks might lead to other changes in NATO's military structure, and some governments would wish to cut NATO military forces and defense spending still further. We believe, however, that a large-scale uncoordinated snowballing of defense cuts by one NATO country after another could be prevented.

27. Any progress toward a reduction of NATO and Warsaw Pact forces would take place in context of a changing political environment both in Europe and in the world at large; indeed, if substantial reductions occurred these would contribute to such changes. Thus, the timing and circumstances of individual steps in the process would to some degree affect both the likelihood of subsequent steps and their final consequences. US-Soviet relations in their broadest sense and the world relations of military power will obviously influence whether and how much movement takes place, but the national objectives and particular interests of individual states will play a major, and perhaps a decisive, role. Reductions in forces, especially if movement is limited and deliberate, may have but few longer term consequences. On the other hand, depending upon how reductions interacted with the changing political environment, they could contribute to a changed atmosphere and a somewhat different structure of power in Europe. Whether such a new situation would strengthen or weaken US interests and European security would depend largely upon the decisions and events which occurred as the process unfolded.

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